

Lesson Twenty-Nine

THE BEGINNINGS OF RELIGION

Scripture Reading: Gen. 4:1-16.

Scripture to Memorize: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts: and through it he being dead yet speaketh" (Heb. 11:4).

17. Q. What are the two general kinds of religion?
A. They are: Revealed Religion, and Natural Religion.
18. Q. What do we mean by Revealed Religion?
A. By Revealed Religion, we mean those systems of religion which God has revealed to man.
19. Q. What do we mean by Natural Religion?
A. By Natural Religion, we mean the pagan or heathen systems of religion.
20. Q. Why do we speak of the heathen systems of religion as Natural Religion?
A. Because they are all efforts on the part of mankind to apprehend and know and worship God from the dim light of Nature, as interpreted by the unaided human intelligence.

The religions usually named as pagan or heathen are: Brahmanism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, and two or three others akin to these and subordinate. Brahmanism is of India. Buddhism had its origin in India, and spread to China and Japan. Confucianism is of China, as is Taoism. Hinduism is the name given to the multiplicity of cults which prevail in India. Zoroastrianism is derived from Zoroaster, the ancient persian philosopher. Moham-
medanism, which originated in the seventh century A. D.,

is of Arabia; and its founder, Ubul 'l Kassim, later called Mohammed, borrowed his idea of the one God from the revealed religions. Strictly speaking, none of these systems can qualify as a religion, although we popularly speak of them as such. They are in reality ethical, metaphysical or philosophical systems.

21. Q. What is the fundamental difference between these pagan religions and the revealed religions?

A. The fundamental difference is, that all pagan or heathen religions show man seeking after God; whereas in the revealed religions, God is represented as reaching down to reclaim and redeem fallen man.

Job 11:7—"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" 1 Cor. 1:21—"For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."

22. Q. What are the inadequacies of all pagan religions?

A. They are inadequate in every respect as spiritual forces.

(1) They lack the authority to retrain the evil passions and propensities of men. (2) They fail to beget and cherish in the human heart a consciousness of sin or a hungering and thirsting after righteousness. (3) They fail to provide an atonement for sin. (4) They fail to offer any plan of salvation from sin. (5) They fail to offer any means of eradicating the consequences of sin, such as physical death, etc. (6) They fail to provide an example of true holiness, such as Jesus gave us in His life. (7) They fail to offer sufficient incentives or means to growth in holiness. (8) In consequence of all these deficiencies, they fail to build a high type of human civilization. They are saturated with such

evils as superstition, animism, asceticism, ancestor worship, sensualism, etc.

23. Q. What are the revealed religions?

A. The revealed religions are: the Patriarchal Religion; the Hebrew or Jewish Religion, commonly called Judaism; and the Christian Religion, commonly called Christianity.

24. Q. Where do we find the authentic record of the principles, laws and institutions of these revealed religions?

A. In the Holy Scriptures.

(1) The laws and institutions of Patriarchal Religion are recorded in the book of Genesis. (2) The Hebrew or Jewish Religion is revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures. (3) The Christian Religion is revealed in the New Testament Scriptures.

25. Q. What is the only revealed religion that is in force today?

A. The only revealed religion that is in force today is Christianity.

Both Patriarchism and Judaism were abrogated and came to an end at the death of Christ. See John 1:17, 2 Cor. 3:1-14, Gal. 3:23-28, Col. 2:13-15, Heb. 8, etc. The only religion through which God promises to enter into covenant relationship with man, in the present Dispensation, is Christianity, the religion revealed and established by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and His Apostles. See John 14:6, 1 Tim. 2:5, Eph. 4:4-6, etc.

26. Q. What was the first institution of revealed religion that God established?

A. The Altar.

27. Q. What was the Altar?

A. The Altar was an artificial erection of earth,

turf, and unhewn stones, upon which sacrifices were offered.

Gen. 8:20—"Noah builded an altar unto Jehovah, and took of every clean beast, and of every clean bird, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar." Gen. 12:7, 8—"And Jehovah appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land; and there builded he an altar unto Jehovah, who appeared unto him. And he removed from thence unto the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the east, and Ai on the west; and there he builded an altar unto Jehovah, and called upon the name of Jehovah." See Gen. 13:18, 22:9, etc. Exo. 20:24-26, "An altar of earth shalt thou make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt-offerings, and thy peace-offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen; in every place where I record my name I will come unto thee and I will bless thee. And if thou make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stones; for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it," etc. See Gen. 26:25, 33:20; Exo. 17:15; Josh. 8:30, 22:10; Judg. 6:25-27, 21:4; 1 Sam. 7:17, 14:35; 2 Sam. 24:21, 25; 1 Ki. 18:30-32; 2 Chron. 4:1, etc.

28. Q. What purpose was the Altar designed to serve?
A. It was to serve as a place of meeting for man with God, who was to be approached with a gift in the form of a sacrifice.
29. Q. What was the first positive ordinance of true religion that God ordained?
A. The ordinance of Sacrifice.
30. Q. Where do we find the first mention of Sacrifice in the Scriptures?
A. We find it in connection with the story of Cain and Abel, both of whom were sons of Adam and Eve.

(1) Gen. 4:3-5, "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto Jehovah. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And Jehovah had respect unto Abel and to his offering; but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." (2) It is suggested that the story of Cain and Abel be used as the scripture basis for the presentation of this lesson to the smaller children.

31. Q. Why did God accept Abel's offering and reject Cain's?

A. Evidently because Abel's offering conformed to the requirements of God's law of Sacrifice, and Cain's did not.

(1) We are told in Heb. 11:4, that "by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he had witness borne to him that he was righteous, God bearing witness in respect of his gifts." The difference, then, was not in their persons, but in their gifts. In Rom. 10:17 we read that faith comes from hearing the Divine word. We therefore conclude that God must have ordained Sacrifice and specified its essential features, as soon no doubt as our first parents lapsed into sin; and that Abel brought an offering which conformed to the law of Sacrifice in every particular, whereas Cain's offering failed to meet the Divine requirements. (2) The acceptance of Abel's offering was, then, in consequence of his faith, which was evidenced by his implicit obedience to God's commands. On the other hand, Cain's offering was rejected because it was not in conformity to the law of Sacrifice, and hence manifested a spirit of presumption and unbelief; the same spirit which, later, led him to commit murder. See Gen. 4:8-16.

32. Q. What was the essential difference between Abel's offering and Cain's offering, that resulted in God's acceptance of the former and His rejection of the latter?

- A. We conclude that the difference was in the fact that Abel's offering was a blood sacrifice, and Cain's offering was not a blood sacrifice.

(1) Cain presented to Jehovah an offering of the ground. But the ground itself had already been placed under a divine anathema. Gen. 3:17—"Cursed is the ground for thy sake," etc. In short, it is evident that Cain wilfully and presumptuously disobeyed God; hence his offering was rejected. (2) Lev. 17:11—"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life." Heb. 9:22—"and according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission." (3) It will thus be seen that Abel's offering was in strict conformity to the law of Sacrifice in at least three particulars, viz., the victim was a "firstling" of his flock, its life was taken, and its blood was shed. Hence it was by faith that "Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."

33. Q. What important lesson, respecting Divine ordinances, should we derive from this incident?

- A. We should learn that men have no right to alter the ordinances of God in any particular; that for man to do so is, in fact, to manifest a spirit of presumption and unbelief.

The Divine ordinances are sacred trusts which God has given His children to perpetuate, in the manner in which He ordained them to be kept. Baptism, for instance, was originally an immersion of a penitent believer in water, for the remission of sins. By what authority, then, have churchmen and theologians substituted for immersion, the sprinkling or pouring of a small quantity of water on the candidate's head? The answer is: solely by their own authority, and without any Divine warrant for the substitution what-

soever. The result is misunderstanding, confusion and division. Thus do men make void the word of God with their own puerile opinions and traditions. Such is "the way of Cain" (Jude 11)—the way of presumption, unbelief, and ultimate rejection by the heavenly Father.

REVIEW EXAMINATION OVER LESSON TWENTY-NINE

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23. Q. What are the revealed religions?
24. Q. Where do we find the authentic record of the principles, laws and institutions of these revealed religions?
25. Q. What is the only revealed religion that is in force today?
26. Q. What was the first institution of revealed religion that God established?
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Lesson Thirty

THE ORDINANCE OF SACRIFICE

Scripture Reading: Heb. 9:16-28.

Scripture to Memorize: "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life" (Lev. 17:11). "And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

34. Q. What was the first institution of true religion which God established?
 A. The Altar.
35. Q. What was the first ordinance of true religion which God established?
 A. The ordinance of Sacrifice.
36. Q. What was the ordinance of Sacrifice?
 A. It was the solemn infliction of death upon an innocent and unoffending victim, and the subsequent offering of that victim to God upon the altar.
37. Q. To whom was Sacrifice offered?
 A. It was offered to God only.
38. Q. For whom was Sacrifice offered?
 A. It was offered for man.
39. Q. By whom was Sacrifice offered?
 A. It was offered by a priest, or by someone acting in the capacity of a priest.